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Chairman: Mr. Zackheos ..... (Cyprus)

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00-29359 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.12 p.m.

Agenda item 91: Questions relating to information (A/54/21 and Add.1 and A/54/415)

1. **Mr. Hogen** (Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information) paid tribute to the members of the Committee on Information and particularly to its Chairman, Mr. Elhassane Zahid, for the valuable guidance provided to his Department in the course of deliberations at the twenty-first session of the Committee. The testimony of their hard work was the consensus reached on important recommendations. He would follow attentively the outcome of the discussions at the current session, which would provide guidance for the formulation and implementation of the activities of the Organization in the field of public information and communications.

2. The communications and public information efforts of the Organization now took place in a highly favourable environment. Since his appointment, the Secretary-General had identified communications as a central priority in his vision of a revitalized Organization and in his plans to build support for the United Nations among the nations and peoples of the world. Indeed, public information was the only activity for which he had established a high-level, independent task force to propose measures through which that function could be placed at the heart of the strategic management of the Organization.

3. The Secretary-General had taken specific steps to implement his vision, including the appointment of a Director of Communications in his Executive Office and the establishment of a Communications Group composed of all senior officials dealing with that function. Those innovative measures had brought greater coherence to strategic planning and made possible a new level of coordination and effectiveness in the Organization's communications outreach.

4. The Secretary-General had also promoted the culture of communications as a means of mobilizing deeper public support for the Organization's mission and activities. To bring about that new level of openness, he had issued the Secretariat's first-ever media guidelines, and had urged all heads of department and their representatives to reach out to the media to project the point of view of the Organization on critical issues. One of his Department's priorities had been to instil that culture of communications within the Organization. To facilitate that, the Department was working with the United Nations Staff Training College in Turin to develop an advanced communications programme for senior officials.

5. That new culture of communications had been illustrated earlier in the month by a briefing programme at Headquarters organized by his Department for editorial writers from all parts of the United States of America. The Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, the heads of New York-based programmes, funds and departments, and the High Commissioners for Refugees and for Human Rights had participated in the programme, the first result of which had been a series of editorials urging the payment of United Nations arrears and highlighting the Organization's contributions to peace and development.

6. After nearly half a century during which the hallmark of the Organization's communications policy had been the extraordinary caution dictated by the prevailing political environment, the necessary transformations would not come about overnight. Despite all that had already been achieved, much still remained to be done to realize the goals set out by the Secretary-General.

7. He was gratified by the new spirit of cooperation with staff in other offices, who had also been quick to recognize the importance of informing people throughout the world regarding their substantive work. In that respect, the Department of Public Information had become the outlet for thematic departments.

8. A priority goal in the area of communications was to highlight the relevance of the Organization's links to the concerns of people throughout the world. The United Nations had been a pivotal player in the great collective achievements of the past half century: decolonization, the elimination of apartheid, gains in health and literacy, powerful social movements for equality, human rights and the advancement of women, and bringing peace to many war-ravaged States. To build greater support for the Organization, it should be emphasized that only true global partnerships could help to overcome the seemingly invincible modern scourges of violence and ethnic hatred, large-scale violations of human rights, poverty, diseases, crime and environmental degradation.

9. Within the strategic communications framework, the Department worked through the Communications

Group to identify and execute long-term and topical campaigns through the Department's various media and outputs. One example of such cooperation had been the worldwide activities throughout the previous year in the run-up to the fiftieth anniversaries of United Nations peacekeeping operations and of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Topical campaigns had also highlighted the problems of small island States and the actions required to address them. The Department's efforts to revitalize the Economic and Social Council had been praised by the President of the Council. His Department was also coordinating a campaign to make the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organization, to be held at Seattle on 30 November 1999, a "development round" rather than merely a trade round.

10. Since the media were the most important vehicle through which global opinion was formed, one of his Department's priorities was to construct a more strategic relationship with them, directly from Headquarters, from information centres worldwide and through civil society partners.

11. Never before had the United Nations had such a level of access to the upper reaches of the media worldwide, through senior officials in the Secretary-General's office and the Department's new initiatives. The vibrancy of that new relationship was reflected in the meeting of television executives from around the world for the World Television Forum organized by the Department; in the decision by CNN to hold part of its annual meeting of nearly 400 national television news producers at United Nations Headquarters in May 1999; in the participation for the first time of renowned journalists from each of the world's regions in the World Press Freedom Day discussions organized by the Department in May 1999; and in the current month's briefing programme for editorial writers from major United States newspapers.

12. Within that broad context, one of his Department's priorities was the rapid delivery to the global media of news about the Organization's activities and objectives. Historically, the Organization's news operations in New York had focused on providing news directly to the media stationed at Headquarters; media in other parts of the world had received news primarily from United Nations information centres and offices. The shift was being brought about through two major initiatives.

13. In September 1999 the Department had inaugurated the United Nations News Centre web site, which speedily recorded news developments as they occurred. The web site, which formed the hub of an integrated multimedia operation, also acted as a gateway to the increasing wealth of news material available throughout the United Nations system.

14. The other major step forward would be taken early in 2000, when the United Nations would begin delivering news directly to major media in every Member State, bringing about a considerable increase in journalists' access to information about the Organization.

15. Another activity initiated by the Department was the placement of articles by the Secretary-General on priority issues, providing the Organization with an opportunity to present its views directly to the worldwide public, rather than through journalists.

16. The Department of Public Information was continuing its efforts to achieve a balance between new and traditional communications technologies. There was no doubt that traditional media were indispensable in order to reach significant and growing audiences around the globe.

17. The Department was responsible for coordinating, maintaining and enhancing the United Nations web site, which had become an important tool in communicating the message of the United Nations to a global audience. The number of visits to the web site had risen from 11 million in 1996 to over 150 million in 1999, but no additional resources had been allocated for that activity.

18. As requested by the Committee on Information, the Department planned to continue improving the web site in all official languages, adding more parliamentary documentation and public information materials and improving the site's search function.

19. The Department was also using the Internet to revolutionize audio-visual programme delivery, and had launched an audio pilot project so that associated radio broadcasters could immediately rebroadcast high-fidelity audio transmissions. The project had been tested with the London-based World Radio Network and with China Radio International. It had become a regular electronic transmission method that would improve the speed and quality of all United Nations

radio programmes, while making them more cost-effective.

20. In the current year, the Department had also produced for the first time a compact disc containing a series of radio programmes on population and development. It had also begun to use the new MP3 technology through which radio stations received daily 5-minute news clips via the Internet. At the same time, the full range of programming continued to be made available on tape to those stations that were not yet able to receive it through the new channels of communication.

21. The Department had also begun preparations, as requested by the Committee on Information, for the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations. It had written to the Permanent Representatives of Member States seeking the necessary contributions.

22. The Department continued to maintain a close working relationship with news media worldwide providing daily television footage through international news syndicates and, through co-productions, was forging strong partnerships with a number of media organizations worldwide. Also, for more than a decade, the Department had been a member of the CNN World Report programme.

23. For the fourth consecutive year, the Department was organizing the World Television Forum, generously sponsored in the current year by the Permanent Missions of Italy and Japan and by a number of organizations; close to 700 broadcasters and television executives from around the world would take part.

24. The Department continued to attach great importance to the needs of resident correspondents at Headquarters. Taking advantage of the available technology, highlights of the daily noon briefing were posted on the web site by 3 p.m. In cooperation with the Department, the Office of the Spokesman for the Secretary-General was to include in its new web site a feature entitled "Ask the Secretary-General" and was exploring ways to improve the dissemination of his messages.

25. The Department was completing preparations for a campaign focused on worldwide problems and on the fact that the United Nations was the only organization which could deal with them; the usefulness of the Organization's activities in people's everyday lives would also be highlighted. More detailed information on those activities would also be provided at the United Nations pavilion at the Universal Exhibition in Hanover, to be held from June to October 2000.

26. Activities in the field of education included the International Student Conference, which was part of the "model United Nations" programme, and relations with web-based educational organizations which included information on the United Nations in their teaching materials.

27. The success of the student conference organized in December 1998 by the Department and devoted to human rights, in which more than 700 students and teachers from various countries had taken part, had led to the preparation of another meeting for the current year on human rights and the culture of peace. The Department had also published several school textbooks in 1999.

28. In 1998 29 non-governmental organizations had affiliated themselves with the Department, taking the total to 1,581. That was clear evidence of growing interest among the NGO community in issues of concern to the United Nations and in promoting the work of the Organization.

29. The Department had recently organized the fifty-second Annual Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations, under the theme "Challenges of a globalized world: finding new directions". It had been attended by over 1,700 representatives of 426 organizations from 47 countries.

30. The Department also continued to provide training opportunities to media professionals from the developing countries. Its annual training programme for broadcasters and journalists from developing countries brought young professionals to Headquarters during the session of the General Assembly and enabled the Department to build a network of broadcasters and journalists who could help to raise awareness of the work of the United Nations in the developing world. Under the special information programme on the question of Palestine, six Palestinian broadcasters and journalists were currently being trained at Headquarters. Under the same programme, an international journalists' encounter had been held in Madrid earlier in the year on the theme "Prospects for peace". The Department was also preparing a new

exhibition on the United Nations and the question of Palestine.

31. The Department had continued to focus on development and human rights. In the current year, emphasis was being placed on the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to be held in 2001.

32. Grave developments during the current year had increased public interest in the Organization's role in maintaining world peace and security. That was both an opportunity and a challenge for the Department, which was responsible on the one hand for publicizing the peacemaking, peacekeeping and disarmament work of the United Nations and, on the other hand, for improving the Organization's operational capacities in the areas of information and communications for field missions. The Department had recently created special web pages containing updated information on United Nations missions and was helping to plan and implement the information components of those missions. Cooperation with other departments had been improved to ensure that information was included in the design of operations, to provide effective information staff for field missions and to reduce the time needed to deploy the necessary equipment and support for radio broadcasts and other information tools.

33. The Department's communications policy continued to focus on the print media. Publications were demand-driven and had become more attractive, more widely available, more cost-effective and more timely. They continued to emphasize the relevance of the Organization's work to the lives of people everywhere. The use of modern technology had enabled the outreach of the publications to be broadened. For example, the *Yearbook of the United Nations* from 1946 to 1996 was to be published in CD-ROM format, making that 50-volume set easily accessible to a wide audience.

34. The major databases of the Dag Hammarskjöld Library, including the United Nations Bibliographic Information System (UNBIS), would be available on the Web by the end of the year. The Thesaurus was already available in English, French and Spanish, and significant progress had been made in translating it into the remaining official languages.

35. The information centres continued to implement one of the objectives of the reorientation process by giving a local voice to the global vision of the United Nations. Through the involvement of all strata of the local population, the centres helped to show the "human face" of the Organization and its relevance to different groups in civil society. The centres were taking advantage of the latest communications technology to transmit timely information on the United Nations, and 27 of them had established web pages for that purpose, many of them in local languages.

36. The Department had given a training course for national information officers and information assistants from information centres in Africa and from United Nations offices in September 1999. In addition, a training seminar for reference assistants would be held at Headquarters in December 1999.

37. The Committee on Information had requested the Secretary-General to consider on a case-by-case basis the functioning of information centres integrated with field offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). That review was currently under way with full participation by the Governments concerned. In addition, a working group composed of representatives of the Department and of UNDP had begun preparing guidelines on the operational framework of centres currently headed by the Programme. That should facilitate the functioning of those offices and increase their productivity.

38. **Mr. Suryo-di-Puro** (Rapporteur of the Committee on Information), introducing the report of the Committee on Information on the work of its twenty-first session (A/54/21), said that the report was divided into four chapters, and described the contents of each chapter. He also introduced the report of the Committee on its resumed twenty-first session (A/54/21/Add.1). Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/59 B, the reports had been prepared by an open-ended working group.

39. The essence of the Committee's deliberations was presented as two draft resolutions (A and B) and a draft decision, contained in chapter IV of the report. Draft resolution A, entitled "Information in the service of humanity", was consistent with the language of the resolutions on the same subject adopted by the General Assembly since its forty-fifth session.

40. He drew attention to minor amendments to footnotes 5 and 6 of draft resolution A. Footnote 5 should also mention the report of the Committee on

Information on its resumed twenty-first session (document A/54/21/Add.1), and in footnote 6 the reference should be to the latest report of the Secretary-General, document A/54/415, rather than to document A/53/509.

41. Turning to draft resolution B, entitled "United Nations public information policies and activities", he drew attention to the paragraphs referring to the role of the Committee on Information and to United Nations policies and activities in that area. For the first time, it was being recognized that the United Nations web sites were a publication and must therefore comply with the relevant guidelines. In the draft decision, it was recommended that the membership of the Committee should be increased from 93 to 95 and that the new members should be Liberia and Mozambique.

42. The Committee on Information hoped that the General Assembly would adopt the draft resolutions by consensus.

43. **Mr. Wilburg** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, reaffirmed their support for the Committee on Information and stressed the need to ensure the development of an efficient communications infrastructure in developing countries through the transfer of advanced technology.

44. Advances in telecommunications over the past 20 years had revolutionized the daily lives of millions of people, as well as business, finance, education and medicine, but much of that progress was beyond the reach of many in the developing world.

45. The United Nations must help to correct that imbalance by promoting technological development in the developing countries. The Department's programme for the training of journalists from developing countries was a commendable example. United Nations information centres were playing a valuable role in disseminating information throughout the world. The Group of 77 and China were concerned that the integration of information centres with the UNDP field offices could hamper their effectiveness, and demanded that integration should be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the views of Governments. The Group of 77 and China looked forward to the review of that process by the Secretary-General as mandated by General Assembly resolution 47/73.

46. The development of the United Nations web sites in all official languages of the Organization was an important goal for the Group of 77 and China, which appreciated the efforts undertaken by the Secretary-General on that matter and welcomed his reports (A/AC.198/1999/6 and A/AC.198/1999/9). The United Nations web sites should be treated in the same way as other publications of the Organization, with due balance among languages and sufficient resources must be allocated for their development.

47. While striving to eliminate the technology gap between the developed and developing countries, it was important to continue sustaining the traditional media in the developing world. Print and radio remained for many the primary means of disseminating information. For that reason, the Group of 77 and China once again urged the Department to implement as soon as possible the pilot project in international radio broadcasting.

48. Paragraph 20 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/54/415) referred to a set of guidelines for Secretariat officials in their dealings with the media. Those guidelines promoted freer association with the media, but did not sufficiently address the issue of attribution. In the past, some Secretariat officials had made statements purportedly on behalf of the Organization when they were only expressing the opinion of the Secretariat or of an individual. The Group of 77 and China called for the guidelines to include rules for the proper attribution of statements by Secretariat officials.

49. Lastly, the Group of 77 and China reiterated their commitment to a new, more just and more effective information and communication order; they would work tirelessly with all delegations concerned with the realization of that goal.

50. **Mr. Najem** (Lebanon) said that, on the threshold of the new millennium and in the light of the astonishing progress of technology, the need to reduce disparities between the developing and developed countries was more urgent than ever. In that regard, the statement of the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China fully reflected the collective position of the Group of Arab States.

51. As Chairman of the Group of Arab States for 1999, Lebanon believed that it was essential to strengthen and streamline the strategies of the United Nations system relating to the culture of communications and to improve the effectiveness of

United Nations media, both conventional (press, radio and television) and more modern ones such as the Internet and web sites. All those media must be available in all the official languages of the Organization, including Arabic, and must be used in the context of a constructive dialogue with a view to strengthening the capacities of the Arab States in the field of communications.

52. The members of the League of Arab States emphasized that it was essential to take steps to ensure that the multilingual nature of culture was reflected in communications at the worldwide level so that all countries could benefit from those communications and from technological advances. Training activities in that area must be strengthened, taking into account that multilingual nature, so that the United Nations system should derive the greatest possible benefit from all the advantages offered by data processing and information technology.

53. On behalf of the League of Arab States, he urged the Department of Public Information to redouble its efforts to resume the publication in Arabic of its annual press releases which contained the resolutions and decisions of the regular sessions of the General Assembly and the corresponding votes. Publication of the Arabic edition of the press releases had ceased, despite the fact that it was very useful for the permanent missions of the Arab States to the United Nations.

54. **Mr. Zaki** (Egypt) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, relating to all the priority issues affecting United Nations activities in the information field. His delegation also wished to make its own observations on certain aspects of those activities.

55. Firstly, in relation to the debate taking place in the Committee on Information on the traditional media and the new modalities and technology in the area of information and communications, his Government was concerned at the obvious lack of balance with which the Secretariat used those media. Radio and television services and printed publications, as well as the Internet, were media to which all Member States had effective access, but in order to facilitate their use the Organization should bear in mind the need to maintain balance between the various languages of those States. The United Nations could reach a greater audience if the media were used in accordance with the needs and the various economic and cultural situations of all users.

56. His delegation recognized the importance of the Internet in modern communications, but the use of that medium was almost entirely limited to users living in the developed countries. The Secretariat should recognize that the conventional media, especially radio broadcasting, were undeniably the most appropriate and least costly means of establishing and maintaining communications with broad sectors of the population in the developing countries. His delegation wished to draw attention to that issue because it had noted that in the Secretariat there were clear disparities in requests for and the allocation of human and material resources between those two information media, the Internet and radio broadcasting. His delegation urged the Secretariat to redress that imbalance and to give equitable treatment to all media; it also looked forward to the report of the Secretary-General on the subject.

57. Secondly, regarding the use of all media including the Internet, his delegation emphasized the importance of establishing a balance among the six official languages of the United Nations, not in the distant future but in the short term. Unfortunately, the United Nations web site in Arabic was very weak and totally failed to meet users' needs. In fact, most of the texts available on the United Nations web sites were in English and French only, and as a result the other language versions of the site were visited much less often. In that regard, Egypt and other States had rejected the proposal presented by the Secretariat in relation to the web sites, which provided for the sites to be strengthened on the basis of the levels of use in the various languages. His delegation believed that that proposal was illogical.

58. Thirdly, regarding media content, at the twenty-first session of the Committee on Information Egypt had proposed a revitalization of the Committee's functions in relation to the message of the United Nations and the determination of its information policies. That issue deserved attention and analysis by Member States. His delegation noted the observations made on that subject by the Chairman of the Committee at its resumed session and hoped that the forthcoming consultations would lead to concrete progress towards the implementation of that proposal.

59. Lastly, on the subject of the United Nations information centres, he commended the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information to restore the Information Centre in Cairo to its previous status, in other words, to its independence in relation to the UNDP office. He hoped that the measures planned in that regard would be implemented as soon as possible so that the Centre could carry out work of the highest possible quality.

60. **Mr. Al-Alawi** (Oman) said that his delegation supported the statement made by Lebanon on behalf of the Group of Arab States and shared the position expressed by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

61. He emphasized the importance of the Department of Public Information and of its efforts to disseminate the message of the Organization and publicize its mission of maintaining international peace and security. His Government attached great importance to the Department's efforts over the past decade to disseminate the ideals of the United Nations and to support a worldwide campaign against racism and racial discrimination. He hoped that that work would continue.

62. He underlined the importance of cooperation between the Department and the Committee on Information. That relationship was vital if the Committee's work was to reflect the difficulties and efforts of Member States. His delegation commended the report presented by the Committee on Information, which reflected the main issues affecting the area of communications in the modern world, in which there was ever more interdependence. In that regard, he emphasized paragraph 26 of the report, which mentioned the need for a transparent information network which could better reflect the world's cultures and civilizations without allowing one ideology to prevail over others. That goal required a greater balance in proposals relating to the issue of information, so that the Committee's work regarding the dissemination of information on worldwide issues should reflect the consensus in the international community.

63. Regarding the advent of a new millennium and the Millennium Assembly, he hoped that the latter would express the aspirations of all Member States including the Arab States, and would not only consider the problems of the United Nations, but also endeavour to establish partnership frameworks with national organizations in each country. The Millennium Assembly would not be fully successful if it passed over the problems of the developing countries, the majority of which were still affected by poverty, widespread hunger and epidemics, not to mention the deterioration of their economies. In that context, the United Nations had the extraordinary responsibility of ensuring that the concerns of developing countries were not neglected.

64. He commended the work of the Department in relation to the use of technological advances in the area of information, including the Internet, to facilitate communications among States, particularly because it enabled information to be disseminated at the lowest possible cost. He hoped that the United Nations would make greater use of the Arabic language in its information programmes in order to reach the media in the Arab States and ensure that the voice of the Organization was heard in their language.

65. Since the situation in the Middle East fell under the responsibility of the Fourth Committee and the issue of Palestine was at the centre of that situation, his delegation believed that the Department should play a constructive part in the peace process.

66. **Mr. Osei** (Ghana) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, highlighting priorities for United Nations activities in the field of information. Ghana attached the highest priority to achieving a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order, based on a free and balanced flow of information. In that regard, the Department of Public Information had a key role to play in bridging the information gap between developed and developing countries. The Department was responsible for developing the culture of communications within the United Nations system to promote better understanding of the Organization and its impact on the lives of people everywhere.

67. His delegation believed that the Department should reorient its activities to ensure that the latest technological developments were applied to improve programme delivery while at the same time strengthening outreach activities throughout the world. Equally important was the strengthening of the Organization's ability to communicate with various bodies at the country and regional levels to ensure that

the global messages of the United Nations were tailored to each country's national orientation.

68. His Government was considering the adoption of a new national communications policy, based on the free flow of knowledge, information and ideas for national development through all the means of communication, taking account of the country's aspirations in a global context. That policy recognized that the high level of illiteracy among the population of Ghana, among other factors, impeded communications and limited the exchange of information, the acquisition of knowledge and the development of skills for national development.

69. His delegation therefore perceived a synergy between the reorientation of the Department's activities and the aspirations of Member States such as Ghana in relation to the task of facilitating their entry into the information age through the development of high-quality infrastructure, industry and services. His Government was interested in strengthening the Organization's capacity to communicate with local institutions through the United Nations information centres, which were providing programmes in local languages and promoting activities which emphasized the relevance of the work of the United Nations for the daily lives of people around the world.

70. Thanks to the "global vision" of the United Nations, which aspired to gain a "local voice" by developing relationships between its information centres and the local community, the efforts of Member States to establish frameworks at the community level would be redoubled, to ensure that various special groups such as older persons, women and children, the illiterate and the rural population would have equitable access to institutions, education and information technologies.

71. No less important were the Department's integrated thematic information programmes highlighting the role of the United Nations in furthering economic and social development, human rights and peace and security. For example, in peacekeeping operations, the dissemination of information in the field enabled the population of countries hosting United Nations contingents to better understand the peace process and accept it, and helped the peoples of countries in conflict to know the true role and significance of international humanitarian agencies.

72. Given the negative impact of small arms and light weapons on conflict situations and the economies of developing Member States, his Government valued the activities of the Department of Public Information and the Department for Disarmament Affairs in publicizing United Nations activities in the field of arms limitation and disarmament. It was his delegation's expectation that the Department of Public Information would undertake a campaign to sensitize the international community to the problems posed by the illicit proliferation and circulation of such weapons in advance of the conference on that subject to be held in 2000, as it had for the Maputo Conference on Landmines.

73. His delegation hoped that the adoption of the draft resolutions proposed in the report of the Committee on Information would make possible a refocusing of the public information and communications strategy towards development issues. Given the challenges of globalization, the dissemination of information on the work of the United Nations was necessary so that the world could better understand the critical issues and that the developing countries could have access to all opportunities for reducing poverty and be enabled to integrate themselves into the global economy.

74. **Ms. Chua** (Singapore) said that, thanks to the development of information technology and telecommunications, physical distance, time differences and national borders were no longer barriers to the free flow of information, and there had been an explosion of knowledge and creativity. Information technology would have a transforming effect in the twenty-first century similar to that brought about by the invention of paper and the printing press.

75. The drawback of that progress was that information technology had forced the drastic reorganization of societies and institutions, weakening the influence of Governments and eroding domestic cultures. It was even possible that some societies might try to use information technology and the media to impose their ideals and values on others.

76. Many countries felt powerless because the changes brought about by information technology could not be avoided. In those circumstances there was no point in struggling against those changes; it was better to take advantage of their positive aspects and try to contain their harmful side-effects.

77. As a developing country with no resources apart from its population, the survival and development of Singapore depended on its ability to adapt to changes, and information technology was a necessity. Instantaneous access to new information and its effective management and dissemination had to be Singapore's competitive advantage. Thanks to the IT2000 MasterPlan and the "Singapore ONE" (One Network for Everyone) project, the island would have by the end of 1999 a national infrastructure which would give individuals and companies access to interactive multimedia services such as the Internet, government services and electronic commerce.

78. Singapore had taken a two-pronged approach to neutralize the pernicious influences which came with information technology and other globalizing forces. On the one hand, broadcasting legislation required Internet service providers to abide by a code of practice. For example, they could be required to block web sites containing material which undermined public morals, social and political stability and religious harmony, and to offer as an option a family-oriented version of the Internet. Measures had also been taken to immunize society against disintegrating factors and to strengthen institutions such as schools, families and the community, which maintained national identity, moral sense and social values and passed them on to new generations.

79. As it faced the challenge, common to all countries, of absorbing scientific and technological change which promoted progress and globalization without diluting the values which were the foundation of its society, Singapore had established the nationwide "Singapore 21" movement, with participation by people of all races and age groups to prepare the country for the coming century.

80. Singapore supported the proposals contained in the report of the Committee on Information (A/54/21 and Add.1) and in the draft resolutions pertaining to agenda item 91.

81. Concerned at the technology gap within and between countries in terms of access to the digital economy and the Internet, Singapore was endeavouring to promote technical cooperation so that developing countries could improve their infrastructure and communications technology. To that end, it had created a programme which sponsored training courses and study visits in information technology and telecommunications, in which almost 10,000 officials from 118 developing countries had taken part since 1992. Such technical cooperation would be expanded as the country progressed.

82. **Mr. Macedo** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Committee on Information had negotiated the texts under consideration in the transparent and representative context of the open-ended working group established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 53/59 B, of 3 December 1998 (para. 43). It was gratifying that that Committee had abandoned the practice of preparing its drafts in the "Expanded Bureau", to which most delegations on the Committee did not have access.

83. The Rio Group attached particular importance to the independent functioning and operational capacity of the United Nations information centres in the Latin American and Caribbean region, and therefore believed that an information centre could be integrated with other United Nations offices only if it was clear that the integration would not damage its independence or its ability to fulfil its mandate from the General Assembly, and subject to consultation with the State in which the centre was located.

84. As for the United Nations web sites and the fact that the English-language site was the most developed of them, the Rio Group was gratified that consideration was being given to achieving modular parity among official languages, and encouraged the Secretariat to continue studying the technological and budgetary aspects of the problem, in order to take the fullest advantage of opportunities to use electronic means for publicizing the activities of the United Nations from a multilingual perspective, to reach the greatest possible number of users worldwide.

85. The Rio Group attached particular importance to the establishment of the Geneva Diplomatic Community Network (GDCNET) to promote international cooperation and improve the dissemination of information among the permanent missions, the United Nations Office at Geneva and the other international organizations based in Geneva.

86. The Rio Group countries considered it essential to continue the United Nations radio programmes in Spanish and Portuguese which were produced in New York and broadcast by local radio stations; they were a very effective means to inform public opinion about what was happening in the United Nations. Any new

initiative should reflect the linguistic diversity of the Organization and should be based on programmes covering all the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

87. While appreciating the idea of making the Dag Hammarskjöld Library an electronically accessible virtual information source, the Rio Group agreed with the recommendation of the Committee on Information that resources should be allocated for the purchase of books and supported any initiative to modernize the Library, which was an indispensable aid to Member States, researchers and national academic communities.

88. **Mr. Saleem** (United Arab Emirates) supported the statements made by the representative of Lebanon on behalf of the Arab States and by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77.

89. The evolution of the media and of communications technology had changed the nature of international relations, and had brought about the creation of an electronic network which had improved people's capacity to assimilate news of political and economic events rapidly. While that progress strengthened cooperation among countries, his delegation was concerned that the exorbitant cost of and the lack of access to new technology prevented developing and poor countries from benefiting from the services enjoyed by Internet users. In view of the growing economic and social disparities between the industrialized and developing countries, a clear international strategy should be formulated, based on the principles of transparency and social justice embodied in international instruments and the Charter of the United Nations, to provide for technology transfers and the provision of resources to restructure enterprises in the information and communications sector in the developing countries, in order to rectify such imbalances.

90. His Government favoured the establishment of an objective international order to provide for free circulation of knowledge and reduce domination by the developed countries. It also rejected the false picture of the beliefs and values of third world countries which was spread by certain media, and invited Member States to establish a code of practice requiring respect for diversity of culture and belief without excluding anyone.

91. Recognizing that the progress of civilizations was to a great extent determined by information, his Government wished to adapt its legislation in the area of the dissemination of knowledge and freedom of information without detracting from the Islamic foundations of its society. Under that policy, it was providing moral and material support to publicly and privately owned communications companies so that they could take part in the planning of social development and help to increase the capacity to implement economic and social programmes for regional development.

92. His delegation valued the information disseminated by the Department of Public Information on activities to preserve peace and security and to promote development, and believed that the Department should collaborate more closely with its centres and other departments to ensure that the information reached every corner of the world.

93. His delegation noted with concern that the Department did not attach the same importance to the Arabic language as to the other languages of the United Nations in its dissemination of documents in audio-visual or electronic format, and urged it to endeavour to rectify that situation in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions. It supported the proposal to develop international radio-broadcasting capacity in the six official languages.

94. The financial deficit of the regional centres should be eliminated, and he hoped that the Secretariat would rationalize costs and integrate services so that the Department could continue to carry out its task fully.

95. **Miss Durrant** (Jamaica), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), subscribed to the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, but wished to highlight some issues of specific concern to the Caribbean region.

96. In a world where the flow of information was expanding rapidly, the responsibilities of the United Nations in the area of public information should not be underestimated, in accordance with the recommendations of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) which called for universal access to basic communications and information services. The United Nations must continue to ensure that the gains of the information revolution were made accessible to developing countries.

97. In his report on the work of the Organization (A/54/1), the Secretary-General had stated that the new culture of communication within the United Nations was central to preparations for meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. The question was what that new culture entailed and what were its benefits. Efforts to restructure the Department of Public Information were laudable, but should be accompanied by an increase in resources to enable it to carry out its extensive mandate.

98. The CARICOM countries fully concurred with the thrust of that strategy, which aimed to publicize the activities of the United Nations, highlight its successes and present it as a dynamic Organization relevant to the needs of all levels of society.

99. Television remained a medium through which the United Nations could effectively project itself. It was therefore essential that the Department should improve its programmes, making them more interesting and reflecting the Organization's diversity and its multi-ethnic and multicultural character, as well as the various development issues.

100. The CARICOM delegations had noted the strong emphasis on promoting the United Nations via the Internet. The report of the Secretary-General on questions relating to information (A/54/415) noted the increased usage of the United Nations web site but, given that it was difficult to obtain access to the Internet in the developing countries, it would be useful to know what percentage of users were from those countries and what issues concerned them.

101. The Department should disseminate information using whatever medium was accessible by the audience it intended to reach. In the Caribbean, despite the growing popularity of the Internet, radio was by far the most widely used source of information.

102. The CARICOM delegations welcomed the creation of a web page on decolonization, given the fact that seven of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories were in the Caribbean region. They also welcomed SIDSNET, which was an important tool for communication among small island developing States. Information was a critical factor in the process of self-determination in those Territories; she therefore urged that that facility should be further developed in cooperation with UNDP and the Department.

103. United Nations information centres played a vital role in organizing meetings and in the dissemination in local languages of information demonstrating how the work of the Organization was relevant to the daily lives of people everywhere.

104. In May 1999 the CARICOM delegations had reiterated in the Committee on Information the need to strengthen the information component in the Caribbean in view of the particular circumstances in the region. The Caribbean currently had only one United Nations information centre, in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, serving some 14 member States and seven Non-Self-Governing Territories.

105. She commended the work of that centre because, despite the decline in human and financial resources, it had endeavoured to carry out its mandate fully. The CARICOM countries thanked DPI for having responded to their request for an information component for the northern Caribbean and were heartened to learn that the Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Trinidad had initiated discussions with the UNDP office in Jamaica and the UNESCO office with a view to establishing a focal point in Jamaica.

106. The CARICOM countries hoped that those measures would result in the establishment of a core post for public information for the United Nations system in Jamaica, which would complement the work of the regional office of the United Nations Information Centre and UNESCO, and urged the Department to ensure that that focal point was provided with the necessary training and equipment for effective liaison with local media.

107. She commended the Department for its multimedia activities and for the information support provided for the Caribbean Regional Seminar on Decolonization held in Saint Lucia in May 1999. She also urged the Department to collaborate more closely with regional media.

108. She thanked the Department for its coverage of the special session of the General Assembly on small island developing States, and hoped that coverage at a regional level would be given to the special session of the General Assembly on follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, and the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in the same year.

109. The report of the Secretary-General (A/54/415) described the work done regarding the development of an international radio-broadcasting capacity for the United Nations. In a survey carried out by the Caribbean Radio Unit, 17 Caribbean countries had responded favourably to the proposal to give airtime to United Nations programming, with preference for programmes with a Caribbean focus. That project should be implemented as soon as possible.

110. The Caribbean region did not have a tradition of short-wave broadcasting. The two major transmission networks, the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU) and the Caribbean News Agency (CANA), had combined their commercial services and were using a single satellite as their primary distribution system. She hoped that the Department would establish close collaboration with the new regional entity.

111. The CARICOM countries wished to place on record their satisfaction with the programming provided by the Caribbean Radio Unit of the Department, but noted that their request to introduce full programming in French and Creole for Haiti had not yet been complied with. They once again urged the Secretary-General to implement fully the recommendations contained in paragraph 9 of General Assembly resolution 38/82 B of 15 December 1983.

112. The CARICOM delegations attached great importance to the training programme for journalists, and agreed that it should be expanded. They also welcomed the continuing efforts to make the Dag Hammarskjöld Library a virtual library, making United Nations information available electronically to a wider public. She was sure that all delegations could attest to the excellent training programmes which had been of benefit to the permanent missions, to the Dag Hammarskjöld Library and to the depository libraries around the world.

113. The CARICOM delegations further welcomed the continued training seminars and workshops for United Nations depository librarians and, specifically, the regional training workshop held in Port-of-Spain in January 1999, and they hoped that such activities would also be expanded.

114. To respond to the multifaceted challenge of information, it was necessary to create strategies, capacities and institutions enabling Governments, the private sector and civil society to collaborate in a common enterprise. Only in that way could an environment be created in which people throughout the world could enjoy a full and creative life.

115. **Mr. Nimac** (Croatia) noted that a new development since the Committee's May 1999 session was the launch of the web-based United Nations News Service.

116. The issue of information was as much bound up with technology as with the principles of access, parity and democracy. Although the Organization must take advantage of technological advances for disseminating information, it was important to ensure that it also used traditional media, particularly radio, which were available to those lacking access to more expensive media. Croatia looked forward to the results of the Department's consultations with Member States and major broadcasters on the availability of extrabudgetary resources for the development of the Organization's international radio-broadcasting capacity.

117. Given the nature of the Organization's constituency, it was not so much a question of choosing the most economically expedient media but of finding the correct balance between the traditional media and the electronic ones in order to spread its message to the greatest possible proportion of the world population.

118. The United Nations web sites showed continuous improvement but progress must continue to be made in that regard, taking into account that the documentation of all the principal organs of the United Nations should be made equally accessible. Security Council documents remained only partially available, since letters addressed to the President of the Council — an important part of diplomatic documentation in the United Nations — were not yet available.

119. The United Nations information centres had an important role in raising awareness of the work of the Organization at the local level and in transmitting information to Headquarters. There was currently a small United Nations Liaison Office in Zagreb, and his Government believed that the inclusion of an information component in that Office would be appropriate to serve the needs of the Organization as well as those of the region, which had been an object of United Nations activity over the past decade. Given the existing offices and other available infrastructure, that could be done without budgetary implications.

120. His delegation welcomed the consensus reached at the resumed session of the Committee on Information on the multilingual development of the United Nations web sites. He hoped that agreement would be reached on a mutually acceptable model. The issue of language parity on the web site should be considered in the light of two criteria: firstly, the extent to which accessibility should be enhanced and, secondly, cost-effectiveness.

121. **Mr. Dausa Céspedes** (Cuba) associated himself with the statement made by the Ambassador of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

122. The globalization processes currently taking place in the world were largely based on technological and scientific advances in the area of information and communications. That generated immeasurable benefits, but did not represent an improvement in the economic and social development of all peoples. The more progress was made and the more information and communications technology advanced, the greater the gap between the developed and developing countries.

123. The globalization of information and communications favoured closer relations among countries, but it also facilitated the imposition of cultural patterns and information mechanisms which tended to reinforce patterns that were increasingly unfavourable to the developing countries.

124. In order to achieve a new world information and communication order, priority should be given to facilitating technological and scientific progress in the developing countries so that they could participate actively in the development of modern information and communications media rather than merely being passive users of those resources.

125. It was time to move on from words to action and, in that regard, his Government noted with interest the work of UNESCO in developing the International Programme for the Development of Communication.

126. United Nations information centres could and should play a major role, particularly in the developing countries, in disseminating information about the Organization. His delegation was concerned at the way in which the integration of the information centres with UNDP field offices was taking place, and it had been observed that the outcome was not always beneficial.

127. He commended the efforts of the United Nations and of the Department to develop the web sites and ensure that the Internet and other modern media reached all developing countries. However, he reiterated that the capacity and scope of United Nations radio and television programmes must not be affected. The web sites should continue to be developed in all the official languages of the Organization.

128. Objective, impartial and non-discriminatory information which took into account the social and cultural characteristics and traditions of peoples helped to strengthen relations among countries, but the international community must prohibit the use of information for political ends, especially for the purpose of subverting the internal order in other States.

129. The First Committee had recently adopted a draft resolution entitled "Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security", which recognized that information technologies and means could be used for purposes inconsistent with the maintenance of international stability and security and emphasized the necessity of preventing the misuse or exploitation of information for criminal or terrorist purposes.

130. All of the foregoing was related to the accusations reiterated many times by Cuba in various forums within and outside the United Nations in relation to the radio and television aggression committed by the United States.

131. More than 1,600 hours of radio and television were broadcast to Cuba each week on more than 26 frequencies, some of which were sponsored, financed and controlled by the Government of the United States, which was spending more than $22 million per year on its electronic war against Cuba.

132. Those broadcasts not only violated the country's sovereignty, but also constituted violations of international law and of the regulations established by the International Frequency Registration Board of the International Telecommunication Union. The broadcasts misrepresented the situation in the country and promoted subversive activities against Cuba.

133. His Government reiterated its denunciation of that aggression and would continue to take all possible measures to repel it.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.